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ABSTRACT

This final report describes activities and accomplishments of the New York Partnership for Statewide Systems Change 2000, a 5-year project to increase and improve inclusive educational services to New York State students with severe disabilities at the secondary level and students with serious emotional disturbance at the elementary and middle school levels. The project provided inservice training, technical assistance, community training, higher education planning, and model demonstration and evaluation activities to accomplish the following five goals: (1) expand and enhance the capability of local school districts (LEAs) throughout the state to serve students with severe disabilities in general education settings; (2) design and propose revisions to funding and regulations to enhance LEAs to collaborate with regional public and private agencies; (3) design and propose interagency agreement models to formalize the provision of comprehensive educational and student support services; (4) expand inclusive teacher teacher-education-approved programs leading to certification in both general and special education; and (5) coordinate activities with related projects and agencies involved in the development and validation of most promising practices. Individual sections of this report describe the project's goals and objectives, major accomplishments, accomplishments by specific goals, problems encountered, technical changes, and impact. (CR)

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New York Partnership for Statewide Systems Change 2000

Final Report

Grant # H086J00009

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Executive Summary

The New York Partnership for Statewide Systems Change (1990-95) and the New York Partnership for Statewide Systems Change 2000 (1995-2000) were five year projects funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. The projects were designed to impact policy and practice in the delivery of educational services to students with special education needs. Comprised of five initiatives, they used a systems change approach in an effort to achieve greater equity of opportunity and excellence in performance for all students. This final report comes at the conclusion of the project entitled the New York Partnership for Statewide Systems Change 2000. A detailed evaluation of the effects of these efforts on schools, which were involved in the initial five-year Systems Change project, is included with this final report. We are encouraged with the very positive results of the project and will continue to work with institutions of higher education with funding from the New York State Education Department's Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities.

Project Description

The purpose of our project was to develop, implement, and evaluate a systems change process and components of revised educational service delivery models in collaboration with relevant professional and community constituencies at every stage in this process. These activities were undertaken with the overall purpose of expanding and enhancing the range of Quality Inclusive Schooling and out of school/community support options available to children with significant disabilities and their families. The emphasis of our efforts shifted from direct project support for new initiatives to utilizing a train-the-trainers model to support inclusive options at the early childhood and elementary levels. We focused our efforts at the secondary level for students with significant disabilities and the elementary / middle school levels for students with serious emotional disturbance. Our efforts also included a major emphasis on inclusive teacher education throughout the state at selected New York colleges and universities.

Statewide Systems Change conducted a series of staff development, community training, technical assistance, higher education planning, and model demonstration and evaluation activities to accomplish the following five goals:

1. Expand and enhance the capability of local school districts (LEAs) throughout the state to serve students with severe disabilities in general education settings.

2. Design and propose revisions to funding and regulations to enable local school districts (LEAs) to collaborate with regional public and private agencies to provide Quality Inclusive Schooling to students with severe disabilities (including serious emotional disturbance) in general education settings and natural environments in the students' neighborhoods.

3. Design and propose interagency agreement models to formalize the provision of comprehensive educational and student support services by local school districts in collaboration with regional public and private agencies, including special education, therapy services, family and child support services, and least restrictive residential options.

4. Expand Inclusive Teacher Education approved programs leading to certification in both general and special education throughout New York State at the early childhood, elementary, and middle/secondary levels.

5. Coordinate New York Partnership for Statewide Systems Change 2000 activities with related projects and agencies involved in the development and validation of most promising practices.

Modification of goals

While students with severe disabilities continued to be of great importance throughout the project, the focus of our capacity building with LEAs was expanded to include the full range of students with disabilities. The intent of the expansion was to enable inclusion to be woven into the fabric of school reform to benefit all learners. It is a delicate task to balance the unique service needs of each learner while diminishing the stigmatizing factors of segregated programs.

Context

New York State represents one of the country's largest and most diverse populations spread across an expansive geographic region with a great variety of cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, and other demographic characteristics. Native Americans, African-Americans, and the many early/different European settlers have long since been joined by a continuing significant immigration of, for example, Asian, Hispanic, Caribbean, and even "new" European groups (e.g., Ukrainian and Russian) of peoples throughout the State. New York State is also a region of great expanse (nearly 50,000 square miles) and substantial contrast—from the Atlantic Ocean shores of Long Island and the urban centers of Manhattan to the lakes, rivers, and mountains of Upstate New York and the plains of the Great Lakes. More than four-fifths of the State's population of approximately 18 million people reside in cities—New York, Albany, Yonkers, Syracuse, Buffalo, and Rochester. In contrast to these urban dimensions, Upstate New York also represents a vast and relatively sparsely populated geographic region (particularly in the North Country and Western regions) that is often rural in nature, with a larger percentage of incomes from farming in comparison to the state overall.

Additionally, New York State represents a complex system of networks that have historically served children and youth with disabilities in settings separate from their non-disabled peers. New York State has more than 700 school districts, and New York City alone has more than one million school age children and youth and over one thousand general education schools. Our New York Partnership for Statewide Systems Change 2000 Project was charged with *statewide* systems change: To accomplish this in a state like New York was, clearly, a major undertaking. Further complicating the picture is the historical support and early appearance of publicly funded regional cooperatives (the BOCES) and an extensive network of private agencies and service providers to address the needs of students with disabilities and their families. At a time when most states were providing little or no services to most students with disabilities, New York State established these various options which were, in keeping with the times, either self-contained within general education schools or segregated as separate special education schools. Evidence of the extent of this task and the need to shift from virtually complete segregation to an emphasis upon community inclusion is supported by the ARC's 1992 Report Card to the Nation on Inclusion in Education of Students with Mental Retardation (New York was ranked 51st and received an "F" on inclusion) and a New York report published two years ago by Advocates for Children entitled Segregated & Second Rate: "Special" Education in New York (sample statistics included New York's placement of 7.12% vs. other 49 states percentage of 37.3% in general education classrooms).

Systems change in New York involves a major population shift as well as redeveloping roles and responsibilities for agencies accustomed and committed to their own specialized expertise regarding severe disabilities; sometimes these agencies believe the general education schools that historically rejected this population are no more ready today than they ever were to accept and celebrate inclusion.

Describe how the goals were accomplished

The actualization of project goals was achieved through the following initiatives:

New York Partnership for Statewide Systems Change 2000 (1995-2000)

- The Emotionally Disabled (ED) initiative – working with students in primary grades who have emotional disabilities (1997-99)
- The Secondary Education (HS) initiative – working with students with severe disabilities in high schools (1995-99)

The Emotional Disabilities (ED) and High School (HS) initiatives were funded as parts of the Systems Change 2000 grant. These initiatives grew out of lessons gained from the first five years of the grant from 1990 to 1995, which focused on the inclusion of children with severe disabilities. The grant proposal identified the ED and HS initiatives as supporting "*new initiatives at the secondary level for students with significant disabilities and the elementary/middle school levels for students with serious emotional disturbance.*"

According to the grant proposal and beginning in the spring of 1997, Systems Change 2000 would select six districts per year for two years of technical and financial assistance. The selection criteria sought the same balance (regional, size, location, etc.) as did the Severe Disabilities initiative, which was part of the 1990-1995 Systems Change project. The Systems Change 2000 project required that sites already be engaged in inclusive practices – thereby justifying assistance in the more challenging areas of ED and HS inclusive education.

Generally, grants were not given to schools for these projects unless they proposed to do something unique – something that had not been done before and for which there were no clear answers. As with the first project, consultants were employed to provide technical assistance (by finding resources, leading and/or planning professional development sessions, and giving general support) to help schools meet challenges. As stated in the grant proposal, "*Direct technical assistance and training support from the project will be focused upon developing a validated systems change process for those levels and children for whom few options now exist.*" While both of these initiatives are part of the Systems Change 2000 project, each worked with different schools, had different coordinators, and engaged different types of students.

- The Higher Education Task Force (HETF) – working to help colleges and universities build the capacity to prepare teachers to work in integrated environments.

The Higher Education Task Force is a consortium of colleges, universities, and New York State Education Department personnel working to promote teacher preparation programs for inclusive practice in classrooms and schools. It was established in accordance with the following goal of the Systems Change 2000 project proposal:

> Goal #4: *Expand Inclusive Teacher Education approved programs leading to certification in both general and special education throughout New York State at the early childhood, elementary, and middle/secondary levels.*

Four immediate roles that the Task Force would play toward the larger purpose were outlined:

- stimulate the thinking of the members in regard to teacher preparation for inclusive schooling that is, to educate ourselves in this matter;
- provide and create models for teacher preparation programming;

- provide support and critique of institutional plans as they were developing; and
- share our efforts with the review agencies of the State Education Department to facilitate new programs proposal review and approval.

Two levels of involvement were originally established in the work of the Task Force. Institutions actively working on developing an inclusive teacher preparation program were included in the Task Force. Institutions interested in the goals of the Task Force, but unable to commit to developing an inclusive program in the term of the Partnership 2000 project, were included in the Statewide Network. Members of the Network communicated through an electronic mail listserv.

Member institutions were asked to identify at least two individuals who might serve on the Task Force. Having two or more members would serve to insure that at every meeting at least one representative would be present, fostering continuity of involvement for the institution, and allowing the Task Force to progress with its work unencumbered by irregular participation. Several institutions have yet to identify a second representative, and are being encouraged to do so.

Throughout the term of Systems Change 2000, the Higher Education Task Force members:

- met approximately five times per year;
- participated in regular site visits to colleges and universities to support ongoing efforts toward program restructuring;
- published *The Standards for Inclusive Teacher Preparation Programs;*
- presented extensively at State and National conferences, including the Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children conference, the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development conference, the Teacher's College, Columbia University Professional Development Partnership and Think Tank on Unified and Equitable Education Conference, and the Association of Teacher Educators conference;
- co-sponsored and presented extensively at the annual NYSATE/NYACTE Inclusive Schools and Communities for Children and Youth conference;
- worked with non-Task Force member recipients of VESID mini-grants to support efforts toward developing inclusive teacher preparation programs;
- met regularly with members of the Special Education Training and Resource Center (SETRC);
- joined the Regional School Support Centers (RSSC), which assists teachers and administrators in high needs schools and districts with professional development; and
- participated in regional meetings of the New York Partnership for Statewide Systems Change.

The above list is not comprehensive, but it does highlight chief activities of the Task Force throughout the term.

- Special Education Training and Resource Center (SETRC) – providing materials and support for teachers, for families and for the community.

Systems Change 2000 participated in 15 State Education Department sponsored convocations of the SETRC network during the five years of the project. Project personnel freely shared resources and materials with the SETRC personnel. Technical assistance via the telephone, email, and website were readily available. Additionally, the project sponsored an annual 2 day retreat for SETRC personnel at Lubin House in New York City. The purpose of this retreat was to showcase project developments, solicit feedback from SETRC network and permit all parties to share experiences and to brainstorm solutions.

- Annual *Inclusive Schools and Communities for Children and Youth* conference – bringing together practitioners, parents, researchers, advocates, federal, state, and local education officials to participate in two days of presentations, workshops, and panel discussions regarding inclusion and equity.

Each year of the project term, Systems Change 2000 co-sponsored this conference with the New York State Education Department and Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID). The conference expanded each year, culminating in 1100 participants and 92 sessions in 2000.

Lessons learned. Problems encountered and how they were solved.

The ED initiative:

In some of the project sites that worked to integrate students with significant emotional disabilities, we encountered difficulties working with agencies. Existing policies and traditions regarding communication, confidentiality and professionalism sometimes created barriers. Mental health providers were often unable to communicate sensitive client information that might have proven helpful to schools who sought to support students with emotional disabilities. Withholding this type of information proved detrimental to students and educators alike. In turn, agency personnel was not always ready to support inclusive education efforts since these efforts seemed to conflict with their desire to provide direct and/or residential services at a cost to the LEA. Essentially, schools and agencies did not seem to fully understand or value the framework that guided their respective decisions. When conflict arose during the creation of new paradigms for problem solving, both groups resorted to traditional stances. This problem was often aggravated when the mental health issues of the students (and sometimes their parents and other family members) resulted in entanglements with the law. Some of these situations improved as trust was earned and each system became more aware of the strengths and limitations of the other. However, some situations were never resolved. Frequent turnovers in personnel within the social service departments, schools and agencies made it difficult to fully establish policies and provisions.

Regarding the inclusion of students with emotional disabilities, we learned:

1. Not to assume that school personnel understands or values the ethics of the mental health agencies or providers.
2. Not to assume that agencies or mental providers understand or value the ethics of the educational community.
3. To recognize the need for individuals working with students with emotional disabilities to debrief and vent their personal frustration and anxieties without fear of repercussions.
4. To plan for coordinated responses to unforeseen crisis, particularly intervention by law enforcement.

The High School Initiative

The mission of the high school initiative to integrate students with disabilities came precisely at a time when the New York State Learning Standards and higher expectations via test

results and graduating students were being realized in our schools. Administrators and teachers have been anxious about the publication of test and performance results. Some individuals have viewed students with disabilities as a potential threat to "good test results." It has been necessary to explain that through collaboration with other service providers, differentiated instruction offers opportunities for all students to learn required material and perform well. Rather than viewing inclusion as an imposition, schools were encouraged to view inclusion and collaboration as an opportunity for success. While most participants in the project sites embraced this opportunity, some (particularly teachers) continued to feel that Standards and Inclusion represented two opposing initiatives that created irreconcilable stresses for them. We believe that some of the comments in the evaluation study give insight into these anxieties.

The Higher Education Task Force

The plan for the Statewide Network was not realized. Perhaps because the plan required greater effort or focus than was given it, perhaps because other matters took priority over this plan, perhaps because the use of electronic mail listserv communications did not generate the dialogue we anticipated, perhaps for these reasons and others the Network did not develop into a viable aspect of the Task Force.

The last email message to the Network was sent on March 25, 1997. No communication was sent in 1998-1999. Essentially, the Network became defunct. While members of the Network may have learned about or kept abreast of the work of the Task Force through other means, the listserv no longer served that purpose.

The SETRC initiative

Although the SETRC initiative was very successful and many enduring relationships have evolved, these facilitators and staff developers continue to indicate the need for outside support. Resistance to change sometimes creates stressful situations that make it difficult for resident facilitators to share "novel" or controversial information with their audiences. While the Systems Change project has supported the development of inclusive models for 10 years, our field personnel tell us that the work is far from finished.

Recommendations for OSEP.

We respectfully recommend that OSEP work with the educational community and mental health community to develop shared understandings regarding the role of each party in the provision of services to students and families. We repeatedly found gaps in service provision when students demonstrated both developmental disabilities and mental health needs.

While we are supportive of the inclusion of students with disabilities in standardized testing since it seems to have enhanced their access to the general education curriculum, we recommend that OSEP carefully monitor the effect that such testing has on these students.

We also believe that it is important for all parties to understand that sufficient time is necessary to allow systemic changes to develop. We recommend that a 10 year time frame is necessary to assess the long term effect of this work especially with regard to changes in teacher preparation programs. It takes a two to five year time period to make changes in teacher preparation programs prior to admission of prospective teachers to the program. The completion of the teacher preparation program takes four years. In order to allow time for induction and the first year of teaching to be completed, the tenth year is necessary to determine any potential effect on student outcomes. We recommend that a consistent process for following graduates and assessing their performance be designed and implemented as similar projects come to fruition.

Appendices

Attach supporting documents only. Confer with your Project Officer before appending additional copies of project products.

Submission

The final report is due 90 calendar days following the expiration of the award – including any no-cost time extension. Two (2) papers copies of the final report should be sent to:

Rose Sayer
Grants and Contracts Services Team
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
MES 3317
Washington, DC 20202

Send one paper copy of the final report and any other project-funded materials (e.g., tapes, curricula, etc) to

ERIC Clearing House on Disabilities and Gifted Education
1920 Association Drive
Reston, VA 20191
Attn: Acquisitions Coordinator